

# The Contents of the Byzantine House from the Eleventh to the Fifteenth Century

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Byzantine studies at the University of Athens live with the legacy of many prominent figures. Among the most significant is Phaidon Koukoules who, singlehandedly so to speak, took up the awesome task of writing the basic book on the private life of the Byzantines. In several volumes, material from the Greek and non-Greek medieval sources is deployed with one basic purpose: to show the unbroken continuity of the Greeks from antiquity, through Byzantium, to modern times.<sup>1</sup>

This lack of chronological nuance and the belittling of outside influence have often been denounced as weaknesses in Koukoules' monumental opus.<sup>2</sup> Yet his works have not been replaced, or even challenged or contested, and they provide a very solid (and very much exploited) basis for all those who read Greek and research the private life of the Byzantines. I am much indebted to his pioneering and impressive works, in spite of the unfavorable reactions that his method—or lack of it—provokes, especially when authors far removed from each other in time are cited in the same footnote. He has provided a mine of material; it is up

to us to use it as best we can, possibly adopting a different approach.

Koukoules describes the contents of the Byzantine house in exceptional detail.<sup>3</sup> Yet one may ask: what was the relationship between the exhaustive list of objects mentioned in his works and real Byzantine houses? Did they ordinarily contain all these objects?

When speaking of the house in general, one has to specify the time period to be examined (in our case, the existing documentation imposes the period from the 11th to the 15th century) and the kind of house that one means. After some thought, I decided that there was no point (and no way, for lack of sources) in looking into the huts of the destitute, which were virtually empty. Poor peasants no doubt constituted a large percentage—in certain periods, the majority—of the Byzantine emperor's subjects, but their dwellings lack interest because they certainly contained very little.

Nor should we look into the imperial palace and the mansions of the few extremely wealthy families. One may easily assume that in these dwellings one would find all—or almost all—the objects that are known to have existed by then. Moreover, this top-level elite tended to respect ancient tradition in spite of changes that had been imposed in the meantime. We know, for example, from Liutprand of Cremona, that in the tenth century official meals at the palace were normally served to seated guests, following the normal practice of the times, except for the banquets held in the hall of the nineteen *akkoubitoi*, where guests reclined on

<sup>1</sup>His two major publications, which crowned a large number of articles in international journals, are: Ph. Koukoules, *Βυζαντινὸν Βίος καὶ Πολιτισμὸς*, 6 vols. (two of which were divided into two parts) and an appendix (Athens, 1948–55) (hereafter Koukoules, *Life*); and *Θεσσαλονίκης Εὑσταθίου τὰ Λαογραφικά*, 2 vols. (Athens, 1950).

<sup>2</sup>E.g., C. Mango, "Daily Life in Byzantium," *JÖB* 31 (1981), 337 ff. Interest in everyday life has recently increased. See A. Berger, *Das Bad in der byzantinischen Zeit* (Munich, 1982); A. Karpozilos, "Realia in Byzantine Epistolography X–XII c.," *BZ* 77 (1984), 20–37; J. Haldon, "Everyday Life in Byzantium: Some Problems of Approach," *BMGS* 10 (1986), 51–72; P. Magdalino, "The Literary Perception of Everyday Life in Byzantium: Some General Considerations and the Case of John Apokaukos," *BSI* 48 (1987), 28–38; and the recent major works of Ph. Ariès and G. Duby, *Histoire de la vie privée*, I. *De l'empire romain à l'an mil* (Paris, 1985), and of P. Veyne, *A History of Private Life*, I. *From Rome to Byzantium* (Cambridge Mass., 1987).

<sup>3</sup>Koukoules, *Life*, II/2, 61–116 (household furnishings); IV, 249–317 (the house); V, 136–205 (lunch, dinner, feast). See also Koukoules, *Θεσσαλονίκης Εὑσταθίου*, I, 47–103, chaps. 1 (the house), 2 (heating and lighting), and 3 (household furnishings).

couches, according to the ancient custom.<sup>4</sup> A less praiseworthy practice of the few, also related to ancient tradition, was to decorate their houses with obscene paintings and plaster statuettes, the presence of which was still denounced in the late twelfth century by Theodore Balsamon.<sup>5</sup> All this was definitely out of what one could call “mainstream” Byzantium.

We are thus led to focus on middle-class households, those of affluent landowners, church or state officials of various levels, and monks and founders of small monasteries, living mostly in the provinces.

How can one describe the contents of an average middle-class Byzantine house? Obviously, one has to concentrate on specific kinds of sources that describe concrete situations and households; one must deliberately ignore all texts that refer to theoretical or ideal situations, especially the otherwise very important lexicographical works or commentaries on ancient texts, which tend to be exhaustive and, by the same token, deceptive, at least so far as our purposes are concerned.

We must find sources that describe actual everyday life. The lives of saints are of primary importance in this respect, since they usually provide domestic details in the most mundane terms as they try to add veracity to their story. They often describe a particular section of society—monastic communities—in which poverty was seen as normal and desirable, but they also describe the homes of laymen.

A different kind of document, much more important because it is more comprehensive, is to be found in the few Byzantine archives that we have. I am referring to the lists of objects contained in wills, in acts of transfer of authority over a household or a monastery, or the lists drafted after one's death in order to establish certain rights of succession. These bring to mind the famous “inventaires après décès” that have been successfully used in studying everyday life in western Europe.

These documents describe in detail the contents of a household—at least most of the noteworthy contents—and sometimes mention their fair market value. Thus one can see the main purpose that each object served: utilitarian, aesthetic, investment and speculation, or a combination of these. What were the real contents of these houses, the

οἰκοσκευή (as it was then and is still called today),<sup>6</sup> or the οἰκοσκευικά,<sup>7</sup> ὀσπιτική ὕλη,<sup>8</sup> or βιωτική ὕλη?<sup>9</sup>

My curiosity about the contents of other peoples' houses was first aroused by a fourteenth-century document preserved in the archives of the Athonite monastery of Docheiariou. It tells a sad story: Manuel Deblitzenos, a heavily armed horseman of the regiment of Thessalonica, was killed by the Turks at Chortiates in 1384. His widow, after due mourning but within the legal time limit of three months, took the steps necessary to assure her control over the fortune left by her late husband. She went to the tribunal and requested that she be guaranteed the protection that Roman and Byzantine law granted to the widow, that is, that she be granted priority over all other people in recovering what had been given to her as a dowry at the time of her marriage, increased by a premium (ὑπόβολον) of one-third its value.

A special tribunal of church officials was formed by the metropolitan of Thessalonica for that purpose. It proceeded according to law and, with the help of two experts, the Thessalonian archontes Demetrios Phoberes and John Maroules, established the fair value of the movable goods that were found in the household of the Deblitzenoi, taking into consideration the original cost of the goods as well as their subsequent wear and tear. The list thus drafted is very detailed—in theory it is exhaustive, since the widow was told that she would be excommunicated if she had hidden any movable or immovable property. And in fact, we find items of rather insignificant value, such as iron rings with glass stones, and bottles that are worth less than one gold coin (hyperpyron) each. The only things that might have been omitted were those of negligible value.<sup>10</sup>

This was quite an affluent household. Maria's dowry had been 1,584 gold coins and her husband's revenue must have been at least 70–80 gold coins a year (this amount was the normal revenue of the horsemen of Thessalonica), not to speak of the rents that he drew from his private estates.

<sup>4</sup>Koukoules, *Life*, II/2, 61.

<sup>7</sup>G. Theoharides, *Μία δόκη καὶ μὴ διαθήκη βυζαντινῆ* (Thessalonike, 1962), no. 2, 1. 125.

<sup>8</sup>F. Miklosich and J. Müller, *Acta et diplomata graeca medii aevi*, 6 vols. (Vienna, 1860–90) (hereafter MM), II, 475 (also called βιωτικὰ εἶδη).

<sup>9</sup>MM, I, 283, cf. 281.

<sup>10</sup>*Actes de Docheiariou*, ed. N. Oikonomides (Paris, 1984), no. 49

<sup>4</sup>Koukoules, *Life*, V, 168.

<sup>5</sup>G. Rhalles and M. Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θεῶν καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων*, 6 vols. (Athens, 1852–59), II, 546.

This economic well-being is reflected in the list of movable property, which include several luxury items. But, after reading the entire list, one is struck by the absence of some very basic items of household equipment: no beds, tables, chairs, or cutlery are mentioned in this enumeration which, as I mentioned, is very detailed and includes items of relatively small value. The items that are missing were certainly not of the kind that could be hidden from the eyes of the commission; if they are not mentioned, they obviously did not exist in this house.

A wealthy house with no beds, tables, or chairs? This could well raise some eyebrows; it invites verification. Thus one is obliged to look for other comparable documents. I found some, very few, coming from the heartland of Byzantium, between western Asia Minor and Macedonia.<sup>11</sup> They are listed here in chronological order according to the exact or approximate date of each document, followed by the place where it was issued, a very brief summary of its contents, and my estimate as to what degree this list is complete.

**1017 Hierissos.** The koubouklesios Stephanos gives to the nun Maria, his daughter, the monastery of the Virgin, with all its buildings and many pieces of land, as well as some movable goods. This is her share of the paternal heritage (εἰς κλήρον καὶ μερίδα σου). The pieces of movable property enumerated here obviously correspond to what she would need when leaving the paternal house in view of moving to live by herself in the monastery.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> I purposely avoided documents from southern Italy and Sicily, which were no longer Byzantine in the time period that interests me. I also avoided documents concerning the top level of society and other special cases. Thus I have deliberately omitted (1) the will of Kale Pakouriane, kouropalatisa and member of the Constantinopolitan elite (1098), in which we have a long list of luxury items and a summary of household equipment: *Actes d'Iviron*, II, ed. J. Lefort, N. Oikonomides, and D. Papa-chryssanthou (Paris, 1990), no. 47; (2) the regulations of the monastic hospitals of Pantokrator in Constantinople (1136) or the Kosmosoteira at Ainos (1152): P. Gautier, "Le typikon du Christ Sauveur Pantocrator," *REB* 32 (1974), 1–131 (lists at lines 905, 925–36 [sleeping equipment], 1057–62, 1147–48 [bathing and cooking equipment], 1104 [serving equipment], and L. Petit, "Typikon du monastère de Kosmosotira près d'Aenos (1152)," *IRAIK* 13 (1908), 17–77 (lists on p. 53, lines 36–39 [sleeping equipment] and p. 54, lines 37–38 [serving equipment]); and (3) documents with obviously very selective lists, such as the will of the monk Gerontios (1219/34): *MM*, IV, 201–3, or the enumeration of the contents of the Virgin Gabaliotissa established in 1375 for the despot Thomas Preljubović: *Actes de Lavra*, ed. P. Lemerle, A. Guillou, N. Svoronos, and D. Papa-chryssanthou (Paris, 1970–82), III, no. 147.

<sup>12</sup> *Actes de Lavra*, I, no. 23 (list at lines 14–17).

**Ca. 1119, Patmos.** Resignation of Sabbas, higoumenos of the monastery of St. John the Theologian, who bequeaths to it many books and other movable goods, probably the contents of the little monastery of the Archangel that he had founded. Very comprehensive list.<sup>13</sup>

**1142 Mount Athos.** Inventory of the movable property of the monastery of Xylourgou, drafted by a commission of monks from Karyes on the occasion of the nomination of a new higoumenos. This list, although confused, must be exhaustive. It is supplemented by the list of (the mostly sacred) objects given to the monastery by the monk Lazaros.<sup>14</sup>

**1233 Mantaia** (to the east of Smyrna). List of the movable property of the abandoned monastery of St. Panteleimon established on the occasion of its being given to the monastery of Lembos. The list should be exhaustive.<sup>15</sup>

**1247 near Philadelpheia** (modern Alaşehir). Will of the monk Maximos, founder of the monastery of the Virgin Koteine in the neighborhood of Philadelpheia. It contains an (exhaustive?) enumeration of the movable goods of the monastery.<sup>16</sup>

**1255 monastery of Lembos** (to the east of Smyrna). Will of the monk Maximos Planites in which he enumerates his movable goods as well as those that he left at his mother's house when he received the monastic habit. The list seems to be exhaustive.<sup>17</sup>

**1270–74 Hermeleia** (in Chalkidiki). Will of the monk Theodosios Skaranos, member of the local gentry, in favor of the monastery of Xeropotamou, enumerating all his real estate and movable property. The list seems to be exhaustive.<sup>18</sup>

**1284 monastery of Lembos(?)**. Will of the tzaousios George Melissenos donating to the monastery all his real estate and movable goods. The list seems to be exhaustive.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Text in *MM*, VI, 241–46. I have prepared a new transcription of the document in view of its new edition (list at lines 1–29 [books], 29–32, 78–86 [movable goods] of the original document).

<sup>14</sup> *Actes de Saint Pantéléémôn*, ed. P. Lemerle, G. Dagron, and S. Ćirković (Paris, 1982), no. 7, *passim*.

<sup>15</sup> *MM*, IV, 56–57.

<sup>16</sup> I have used the edition of M. Gedeon, *Διαθήκη Μαξίμου μοναχοῦ, κτίτορος τῆς ἐν Λυδία μονῆς Κοτινῆς* (1247), *Μικρασιατικὰ Χρονικά* 2 (1939), 271–91. The document was previously published by S. Eustratiades in *Ἑλληνικά* 3 (1930), 325–39.

<sup>17</sup> *MM*, IV, 74–75.

<sup>18</sup> The document is preserved in two versions without major variants of substance: *Actes de Xeropotamou*, ed. J. Bompaire (Paris, 1964), no. 9.

<sup>19</sup> *MM*, IV, 266–67. The donor died shortly after drafting his will, presumably in the monastery: H. Ahrweiler, "L'histoire et

TABLE 1

	1017	1119	1142	1233	1247	1255	1270	1284	1314	1325	1365	1394	1400	1401
chests			*		*	*	*		*			*		
sleeping equipment	*	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
beds		*					*							
bathing equipment	*	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	*		*	*	*
garments, belts						*			*		*	*	*	*
icons			*	*	*		*			*		*	*	*
jewels			*			*			*	*	*	*		*
books			*	*	*		*							*
tools			*	*	*		*	*		*				
weapons			*			*				*			*	
kitchenware	*	*	*	*	*		*	*		*	*	*	*	*
jars, barrels	*	*	*	*	*	*	*		*	*				
serving equipment		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*		*	*	*
plates, glasses		*	*	*			*	*					*	
cutlery			*							*			*	
tables		*		*	*		*						*	
chairs			*				*							

*1314 Thessalonica.* Will of Theodore Karavas with a detailed list of his real estate and movable goods. The list is detailed but not exhaustive, since Theodore mentions in a summary fashion pieces of property that were already given to his married children and other property that was to be inherited by his (still living) wife.<sup>20</sup>

*1325 Beroia.* Will of the skouterios Theodore Sarantenos endowing the monastery of St. John the Baptist, which he had founded. Very detailed list of movable goods.<sup>21</sup>

*Ca. 1365, Constantinople.* Agreement concerning the dowry that was received by a certain Theodore. The document is preserved under the title *προιξ Θεοδώρου* in the minutes of a Constantinopolitan notary, together with documents of the year 1365. Since this document is a contract, the list of items promised to the groom must be exhaustive.<sup>22</sup>

*1394 Thessalonica.* Detailed inventory of all the

belongings left by Manuel Deblitzenos, made in order to restore to his widow what she was entitled to because of her dowry. Exhaustive list.<sup>23</sup>

*1400 Constantinople.* The patriarch authorizes Andronikos Trichas to take possession of his paternal inheritance, which was until then under trusteeship because Andronikos was not of age. Exhaustive list.<sup>24</sup>

*1401 Constantinople.* Exhaustive enumeration of the movable goods that should have been part of the dowry given to a certain Kontodoukas, who was from Selybria.<sup>25</sup>

This is a limited and random group of sources: fourteen documents that cover four centuries and a vast region. But this is all we have.<sup>26</sup> I shall try to proceed by grouping the available information according to the possible uses for the various items. For a general image of the contents of these lists, see Table 1.

Many households included *chests*, in Greek *κιβώτια* or, from the Latin, *κασσέλαι*, or from the

la géographie de la région de Smyrne entre les deux occupations turques (1081–1317) particulièrement au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *TM* 1 (1965), 172.

<sup>20</sup> *Actes de Chilandar*, ed. L. Petit and B. Korabiev, *VizVrem* 17 (1911), Prilozhenie 1, no. 27.

<sup>21</sup> Theodorides, *Μία δίκη*, 17–28, list on 19–20 (I checked the readings against a photograph of the original document, preserved in Vatopedi).

<sup>22</sup> G. Ferrari, “Registro vaticano di atti bizantini di diritto privato,” *SBN* 4 (1935), 265.

<sup>23</sup> *Actes de Docheiariou*, no. 49, cf. above.

<sup>24</sup> *MM*, II, 406–7.

<sup>25</sup> *MM*, II, 504–5.

<sup>26</sup> Similar documents exist for earlier periods, beyond the scope of the present study, and attention has been drawn to their lexicographic interest: J. Diethart, “Lexikalische Rara in drei byzantinischen Mitgift- und Heiratsgutlisten des 6.-8. Jh. aus der Wiener Papyrussammlung,” *JÖB* 33 (1983), 7–14.

Arabo-Turkish name, σεντούκια. They were worth anywhere from 2 to 10 gold coins (hyperpyra); they were obviously used for storing and protecting food, garments, and other utensils, including precious objects (titles of property, books, or even cash<sup>27</sup>). It is conceivable that all of an individual's possessions could be held in one such chest, and a small one at that.<sup>28</sup>

*Sleeping equipment* appears in all the above lists. The most common items are rugs (τάπητες . . . εἰς ὕπνον<sup>29</sup>) used in lieu of pallets or mattresses (ἐπεύχια) or the mattresses<sup>30</sup> themselves (πιλωτά<sup>31</sup> or ὑπαπλώματα<sup>32</sup>), and of course the various covers, blankets, usually of wool, often imitating animal fur (and then called, as they are today, βελεσικόν), or of real animal furs. Sometimes quilts are mentioned, filled with wool, some covered with silk material. Pillows are common, some also covered with silk.<sup>33</sup> All this appears consistently as the main category of household goods. It is also one of the most expensive, with values ranging from 2 to 32 gold coins (hyperpyra),<sup>34</sup> second in value only to high-quality jewelry. Occasionally one also finds, as in the case of the Deblitzenoi, curtains and canopies, which were suspended from the ceiling of the sleeping quarters to protect their owner from insects and from curious onlookers.

But, contrary to the above, and in spite of it, *beds* are very seldom mentioned in these documents. In only two lists, one drafted on the island of Patmos (early 12th century) and the other in Hermeleia of Chalkidiki (late 13th), beds appear; they are κρεβάτια συμβαλτά or ἐξηλωμένα, that is, composite beds, which one could disassemble and store in a corner. It is recommended that they be used with mattresses, and, in the case of the monastic list from Patmos, it is clearly specified that they should

be placed mainly at the disposal of the sick<sup>35</sup> and of visitors, especially of distinguished visitors. In other words, the use of beds is described as being exceptional. This would explain why they are not mentioned with the normal equipment of Byzantine houses. On the contrary, beds are mentioned in the imperial palace and presumably existed in the lesser palaces of the nobility.

But of course beds were not at all unknown even in the lower strata of society. In the lives of saints as well as in the twelfth-century poems of Theodore Prodromos,<sup>36</sup> the poor and the ascetic monks sleep either on mats or, at times, on animal skins, while those better off, or those less inclined to hardship, use a mattress or a sleeping rug (also called prayer rug, ἐπεύχιον, τάπης ἐπενυκτικός<sup>37</sup>), or sometimes also a κοιτάριον, or couch. Pallets, called σκίμποδες, are also often mentioned, and were mainly used for the sick or as litters to take the dead to burial.<sup>38</sup> Yet sleeping directly on the

<sup>35</sup> Beds are also mentioned as being standard equipment of the monastic hospitals of Pantokrator and Kosmosoteira, cf. above, note 11. See also the typikon of Gregory Pakourianos, para. 29, 2 (beds in a hostel) and Delehaye, *Deux typica*, 134.

<sup>36</sup> E.g., D. Hesseling and H. Pernot, *Poèmes prodromiques en grec vulgaire* (Amsterdam, 1910), 32, 35; I. A. Heikel, "Ignatii diaconi Vita Tarasii archiepiscopi CP," *Acta Societatis Scientiarum Fennicae* 17 (1891), 401; A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, "Žitija dvuh vselenskikh patriarhov XIV v.," *Zapiski Ist. Filol. Fakulteta Imp. Univ.* 76 (1905), 5 (distinction between κλίνη and σκίμπος); V. Laurent, *La vie merveilleuse de Saint Pierre d'Atroa* (Brussels, 1956), 199; H. Delehaye, *Les saints stylites* (Brussels, 1923), 167–68; *ActaSS*, July VI, 601; Sept. VIII, 813; Nov. III, 523; and Nov. IV, 646; A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Monumenta graeca et latina ad historiam Photii patriarchae pertinentia* (St. Petersburg, 1899), 3; B. Vasilevskij, "Life of St. Meletios," in *Pravoslav-nij Palestinskij Sbornik* 6.2 (1886), 9; "Life of Basil the Younger," ed. A. Veselovskij, in *Sbornik otdelenija russkago jazyka . . . imp. akad. nauk* 46 (1889–90), 48, 51 (σκίμπος), 62, 75; I. Hausherr, *Vie de Syméon le Nouveau Théologien par Nicéas Stéthas* (Rome, 1928), 34; *AB* 41 (1923), 304; *PG* 100, col. 129; *ibid.*, 120, cols. 45, 161; *ibid.*, 151, col. 608. It should be added though that it is impossible to know the exact meaning of the word κλίνη in all instances; sometimes it is clear that it is a separate piece of furniture since it is also called σκάμνος or κοιτάριον; in other cases this is not at all certain, and it could as well designate the permanent couch along the wall: see below, p. 210 and note 39.

<sup>37</sup> B. Latyšev, "Methodii patriarchae CP Vita S. Theophanis Conf.," *Zapiski Rossijskoj Akademii Nauk* ser. 8, 13.4 (1918), 7; *PG* 111, col. 705; E. Kurtz, "Zwei griechische Texte über die hl. Theophano, die Gemahlin Kaisers Leo VI.," *MASP*, ser. 8, 3.2 (1898), 15; E. Sargolagos, *La Vie de Saint Cyrille le Philéote* (Brussels, 1964), 249.

<sup>38</sup> Heikel, "Ignatii diaconi," 421; Papadopoulos-Kerameus, "Žitija dvuh," 5, 144, cf. 146; *PG* 99, cols. 324, 805; *ibid.*, 120, col. 81, *ibid.*, 127, col. 484; *ibid.*, 151, col. 639; *ActaSS*, Nov. IV, 668, 686; *AB* 70 (1952), 58, 97; A. M. Talbot, *Faith Healing in Late Byzantium* (Brookline, Mass., 1983), 110; F. Dvornik, *La Vie de Saint Grégoire le Décapolite et les Slaves macédoniens au IXe s.* (Paris, 1926), 56; Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Monumenta graeca et latina*, 20; Chr. Papoikononou, 'Ο πολιοῦχος τοῦ Ἀργους ἄγιος Πέτρος (Athens, 1908), 103.

<sup>27</sup> Titles of property: *Xéropotamou*, no. 9A, lines 35–36; *MM*, II, 309; books: *Byzantion* 31 (1961), 139; cash: *MM*, IV, 398, and A. Dmitrievskij, *Opisanie liturgičeskikh rukopisej hranjaščihja v bibliotekah pravoslavnago vostoka*, I, Τυπικά (Kiev, 1895), 729; garments, icons: *MM*, I, 539.

<sup>28</sup> *MM*, I, 281.

<sup>29</sup> C. Sathas, *Μεσαιωνική Βιβλιοθήκη*, IV (Venice, 1872), 339.

<sup>30</sup> *PG* 105, col. 893: a "high" mattress (ὕψηλὴ στρωμνή). For an earlier period see H. Harrauer, "Matrazen für die Gefangene," *APf* 33 (1987), 69–72.

<sup>31</sup> On the term, see *JÖB* 36 (1986), 361.

<sup>32</sup> Mention of a χρυσῶν ὑφάπλωμα in *AB* 54 (1936), 62.

<sup>33</sup> Cf., e.g., a pillow cover (προσκεφαλοένδυσις) worth 5 hyperpyra: *MM*, II, 474. Cf. *ActaSS*, Nov. III, 572 (πάλλιον . . . τάξιν μηλωτῆς ἀποπληροῦν, used as a pillow).

<sup>34</sup> In *MM*, II, 481–83 there is question of a bedcover (κρεβατοστρώων) worth 6 hyperpyra. I assume that the κρεβατοστρώων was composed of the "blankets with their mattresses" (σκεπάσματα καὶ τὰς ὑποστρώσεις αὐτῶν): H. Delehaye, *Deux typica byzantins de l'époque des Paléologues* (Brussels, 1921), 57.

floor is always considered exceptional, something that only monks accustomed to hardship would regularly practice—monks and the occasional imitator, such as Emperor Nikephoros Phokas in 969.

If the average person did not sleep on the floor, but also used a real bed only exceptionally, then where did he sleep? One thinks of mattresses that were placed on the floor at night and put aside during the day. There is more: tenth- and eleventh-century texts speak of high mattresses made of wood or built with stones (in one case, of “dry stones,” ἐκ ξηρολίθων,<sup>39</sup> i.e., without any mortar); such expressions and the knowledge of how oriental living quarters looked in recent times—and still do in Athonite monasteries—may provide another solution. Old-style rooms—beginning with prehistoric palaces, for that matter—normally had a permanent, non-movable, long couch built of stone or made of wood, which ran along their walls, often three walls. By day it could be used for seating and for entertaining many people, while at night it could—and was—used for sleeping. Since it was part of the building, this permanent couch would not be counted as furniture, and consequently was not mentioned in our lists. Only rarely would one find in an average middle or late Byzantine house something resembling what we would call a bed.

*Bathing equipment and garments* are also mentioned regularly in the lists. Ewers, basins, and buckets, χερνιβόξεστα,<sup>40</sup> σιτλοεπιχύταρα, ἐπιχυτήρια, σίτλαι, λεκάναι, and σαπουνάρια of all kinds and shapes, water vases called sometimes by the Turkish name μαστραπᾶς, all that was necessary to take water from a basin and pour it over oneself, were usual items of household equipment, though in small numbers. Special basins are mentioned for washing one's feet (ποδοπλύτης).<sup>41</sup> These objects, as well as the various towels of linen or cotton that accompanied them, were not particularly expensive (2–6 hyperpyra each). But their number was limited, even in aristocratic households (one or two of each item), which indicates that they were at the disposal of the whole family

for common use. They represented a small part of the total value of household goods.

In contrast, the number of *garments* varied according to the social level of each household. Some were extremely expensive or even priceless because they were imperial gifts. These do not present much interest for us.

In most middle-class households one would find from one to three formal outfits, worth 2–6 hyperpyra each. Thus one can say that they appeared as reasonably expensive items, comparable in price to some of the bath equipment.

Particularly expensive (and always mentioned separately) were *belts*, some of which were decorated with gold and precious stones.<sup>42</sup> Belts were signs of rank and authority, and their number varied from household to household. Theodore Sarrantenos of Beroia possessed at least six belts, while others had only one—and not very valuable ones at that.

Similar remarks can be made about *icons* and *jewels*, the number and value of which varied with the individual's social and financial status. We find one household with up to seven icons, each of which was worth 2–7 hyperpyra, and another with seventeen icons, one of which was brought to Beroia from Constantinople. Icons seem to have been far less expensive than a good silk blanket. Some of the jewels were cheap, everyday items (the Deblitzenoi possessed seven rings of less than 1.5 hyperpyra each), while others were quite valuable (earrings worth 36 and 48 hyperpyra, and another pair which, together with its matching brooch, was valued at 154 hyperpyra). Most people felt the need to have some or at least one piece of jewelry. It is mentioned in all types of households<sup>43</sup> and obviously constituted an investment (and a reserve in cash), since it could be pawned.<sup>44</sup>

*Books*, on the contrary, are mentioned less often in these lists and again appear to be an item most often found in monasteries or in the households of members of high society. It is hard to say whether the mere possession of books can be con-

<sup>39</sup> *ActaSS*, Nov. III, 557. Cf. L. Carras, “The Life of Saint Athanasia of Aegina,” *Maistor: Classical, Byzantine and Renaissance Studies for Robert Browning*, ed. A. Moffatt (Canberra, 1984), 214.

<sup>40</sup> A paten inscribed χερνιβόξεστον is preserved in the Hermitage: A. Bank, *Byzantine Art in the Collections of Soviet Museums* (New York-Leningrad, 1977), nos. 64–65.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. also Delehay, *Les saints stylites*, 212; Sargologos, *Saint Cyrille le Philéote*, 79.

<sup>42</sup> In the will of Theodore Karavas we find one belt (ἀγγυροεπίχρυσος) worth 8 hyperpyra. Belts are also often mentioned in lives of saints and other texts. See Heikel, “Ignatii diaconi,” 401; *ActaSS*, March III, 26, 28 (a belt worth 2 nomismata); Papadopoulos-Kerameus, “Žitija dvuh,” 132, 133; “Life of Basil the Younger,” ed. A. Veselovskij, in *Sbornik otdelenija rus-skago jazyka . . . imp. akad. nauk* 46 (1889–90), 9; MM, II, 419 (ζωνάριον φραγγικόν worth 50 hyperpyra), 446, 486, 487.

<sup>43</sup> MM, I, 54–55, 105, 281; II, 300, 419, 446, 474–75, 558, 559 (earrings worth 150 hyperpyra), 563 (*trachilea* worth 90 hyperpyra).

<sup>44</sup> E.g., MM, I, 106–7; II, 511–12, 587.

sidered as a sure sign of literacy. But we know that these books were quite expensive and consequently only wealthy people were in a position to buy them, even if they were not able to read them by themselves. In wealthy families there was a greater chance of finding at least one literate member or, at worst, of finding a slave or a secretary who would be available for reading to his masters. In the wealthiest household for which there is extant information, that of the Pakourianoι (above, note 11), there were only four books, obviously luxury manuscripts. But a gentleman farmer, like Skaranos of Hermeleia, had at least twenty-one volumes of church literature, some of which were bound. In several other lay households there were no books at all.

*Tools and weapons* do not appear with any regularity. Few of the households that we have examined had agricultural activities, despite the fact that they were situated in the provinces and certainly drew most of their subsistence from agriculture. Tools such as axes, pick-axes, and spades are mentioned in monasteries (which is natural) and in a few lay households. We must assume that this peculiarity is related to the exploitation system that prevailed in late Byzantium: usually the landowner (or the pronoiarios) leased his land to paroikoi, who owned all the equipment necessary for cultivating it. In most cases the landowner did not personally participate in the production process, except for some gentlemen farmers (like Skaranos of Hermeleia) and the monks who had to work the land themselves.

Weapons are strikingly rare for a medieval society. They appear only in the houses of the military and in isolated monasteries (such as that of Xylourgou). Some professional army officers have an almost complete set of armor, and indeed boast that they brought such items from Constantinople (coat of mail, cuirasse, helmet, sword); another private individual, an orphan in Constantinople in 1400, had a sword (a costly one, worth 20 hyperpyra), which he had received as an inheritance. It was kept under trusteeship, obviously because of its value, and not necessarily because the youth might use it one day. It is clear that in this society the protection of the household as well as that of the state was left to professionals and that the average Byzantine rather disliked the idea of spending money on arms. In the medieval world, in which almost everyone, in the Islamic East as well as in the Christian West, bore weapons, the Byzantines were the exception. It is not difficult to

understand why others called them effeminate. At any rate, in the households that I have examined, there were definitely more books than weapons.<sup>45</sup>

*Kitchenware*, kettles and frying pans, are rarely mentioned in the lives of saints. The lists of household contents are much more informative on this point. Cauldrons (λάβητες, κακάβια, καρδάρια, μι[λι]άρια, κουκούμια), kettles (χύτραι), saucepans (σαλτζερά) or frying pans (τηγάνια), and grills (ἔσχάρα, σκάρα) appear in all lists, as many as ten in affluent houses, but only one among the poor.<sup>46</sup> Their value is small or moderate (1–2 hyperpyra), despite the fact that they are mostly made of metal, mainly copper (χάλκωμα). In some cases they are accompanied by pot hangers (κρεμαστάλυσον) or by tripods (πυρωστίαι, πυρομάχοι) that allowed them to be placed over a fire.

Large jars (πίθοι) or barrels (βαγένια) for storing oil, wine, or wheat are found only in the households of laymen or monks living in the countryside, who had to store the year's harvest in their houses.<sup>47</sup> In city households, which probably bought their produce in small quantities from local shops, large storage facilities were not necessary.

*Serving equipment* appears in most of the lists: bottles or pitchers for liquids, some of which were reputed to lower the temperature of their contents and for this reason are called κρυωντήρια/κρυεντήρια (1–2 hyperpyra each), κεραστικά, σταγονικά. They are the most common (2–10 per household). Some of these are metal (χαλκοστάμνια) and should not necessarily be identified with the clay jugs which are known for cooling the liquid that they contain. Wine or water carafes (οἰνοχεῖα, ὑελοξέστια, κουρούπια) made of silver, copper, or glass also appear in limited numbers (1–3 per household).<sup>48</sup> Big serving plates (σκουτέλλια, γαβαθίτζια) with decoration, sometimes made of sil-

<sup>45</sup> An expensive part of weaponry was of course the (not necessarily military) riding equipment, the καβαλλαρικά, which could be worth 40 hyperpyra (MM, II, 587–88).

<sup>46</sup> They also sometimes appear in lives of saints: A Papadopoulos-Kerameus, Συλλογὴ παλαιστινιακῆς καὶ συριακῆς ἀγιολογίας, I, 207; ActaSS, Nov. III, 528; AB 54 (1936), 54, 63; PG 100, col. 117; ibid., 111, col. 689; ibid., 120, col. 61; Papadopoulos-Kerameus, "Zitija dvuh," 35.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Hausherr, *Syméon le Nouveau Théologien*, 74; Laurent, *Saint Pierre d'Atroa*, 175; ActaSS, Nov. II/1, 367; ibid., III, 533, 545; ibid., IV, 667; ibid., June VII, 171; PG 151, col. 583; Papadopoulos-Kerameus, Ὁ πολιοῦχος τοῦ Ἀργίου ἁγίου Πέτρος, 66; AB 14 (1895), 149, 157.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. ActaSS, Nov. III, 537, 545, 552, 573; ibid., IV, 643 (καψάκης, ἀμφορ(διον)); Heikel, "Ignatii diaconi," 403; Arsenij, *Žitie i podvigi sv. Theodory Solunskoj* (Jurjev, 1899), 25; Βυζαντίς 1 (1909), 247 (ληκυθ(διον)); PG 111, col. 637; MM, II, 474, 475.

ver, usually of copper, also appear in very small numbers and by no means in all households.<sup>49</sup>

Also relatively rare are deep, flat individual *plates* of earthenware or wood, which appear mainly in monasteries.<sup>50</sup> Cups are seldom mentioned—three in one household, two in another—while drinking *glasses* appear only in monasteries,<sup>51</sup> together with the above-mentioned plates. The only *cutlery* found in these lists are spoons (κοχλῖ-ἀρια), two in one layman's house, twenty in another's, and twenty-four in a monastery.

What is not found in the above lists speaks as eloquently of the way of life of the average Byzantine as what does. No knives or forks appear, although they are known to have existed. Spoons are rare and occur mainly in milieus in which individual eating plates were also deemed necessary. Although one cannot exclude the probability that cheaper clay or wooden utensils were used, it seems obvious that eating procedures were rather simplified in the average lay household, and that people often, if not always, ate with their fingers from a large serving plate and drank from a common cup or jar. In the lives of saints there is often mention of drinking glasses and even more often of (undoubtedly cheap) clay cups (κεράμιον, βίκος) that people used for drinking.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, in monasteries (and hospitals<sup>53</sup>) where rationing of food (and wine) was paramount in order to be fair (and to maintain discipline), and where a long-term investment in basic cleanliness and healthy habits was more important, individual plates, spoons, and glasses were considered necessary, at least for the monastic rank and file. Consequently, the absence of such utensils in provin-

cial middle-class homes could well be the result of a deliberate choice in an effort to simplify the process and perhaps economize. I must emphasize that I am not speaking here about imperial banquets or those of high society, which are far beyond the scope of this paper and had their own rules, probably similar to those of monastic refectories. I must also add that the description proposed here concerns middle- and lower-class households, mainly in the provinces. In Constantinople the use of plates, spoons, and glasses is far better attested, for example, by Theodore Prodromos.<sup>54</sup>

*Tables and furniture for seating* are also notably rare in these lists of household goods. Tables appear in five documents, and seats are found only in the will of the monk Sabas, who lived on Patmos in the early twelfth century, and in the will of Skaranos, who lived in Hermeleia of Chalkidiki in the late thirteenth. Some tables had removable tops that were placed on trestles; when not in use they could be folded and set aside. Some were solid pieces of furniture, with four legs (τετραπόδια), and one had some decoration (τορνευτόν). Seats are much rarer: on Patmos we find twelve stools (σκαμνία) and two chairs or armchairs (θρονία, the word being a diminutive of throne), obviously reserved for the elite among the table companions. In Hermeleia, in a layman's household, we find five stools and two long benches (μακρουσκάμνια), and we can deduce that this country gentleman, the same one who owned a library of twenty-one books, could hold dinner parties and seat at least a dozen guests, probably more. The other tables are not accompanied by chairs.

Such tables are also mentioned in several lives of saints, sometimes together with stools or chairs/armchairs.<sup>55</sup> Theodore Prodromos describes how a table had to be set up before a meal (obviously because it had been previously folded and put away) but does not describe the seats used for the guests.<sup>56</sup>

We also have evidence of some refectories with permanent tables. The best-known example comes from the monastery of Lavra, where egg-shaped tables, their marble tops supported by oblong slats, are surrounded by oval benches that are stationary

<sup>49</sup>Cf. AB 54 (1936), 63; Papadopoulos-Kerameus, "Žitija dvuh," 19; PG 111, col. 713; A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, Ἀνάλεκτα Ἱεροσολυμιτικῆς Σταχυολογίας (St. Petersburg, 1898), V, 315.

<sup>50</sup>And in the hospitals of Pantokrator and Kosmosoteira for the use of the sick; see above, note 11. See also MM, I, 153; II, 300, 490.

<sup>51</sup>A collection of glasses is also mentioned in the typikon of Gregory Pakourianos, para. 34 (p. 148 of the Kauchtschischvili edition).

<sup>52</sup>Cf. Laurent, *Atroa*, 175; AB 54 (1936), 54, 55, and 51 (περσικάριον); Vasilevskij, "Life of St Meletios," 64; Papadopoulos-Kerameus, "Žitija dvuh," 18; J. Noret, *Vitae duae antiquae sancti Athanasii Athonitae* (Turnhout, 1982), 198, 205; PG 100, cols. 1145, 1164; *ibid.*, 111, col. 648; *ibid.*, 120, cols. 44, 64; Delehay, *Les saints stylites*, 212; *Byzantion* 25–27 (1955–57), 53; K. Lake, *The Early Days of Monasticism on Mount Athos* (Oxford, 1909), 25; *ActaSS*, March III, 26, 27, 28; *ibid.*, Nov. II/1, 345; *ibid.*, III, 523, 526, 534, 561; Sargologos, *Saint Cyrille le Philéote*, 85, 114, 244; Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Σύλλογῃ*, I, 202; "Life of Basil the Younger," 17, 18, 23, 24, 44, 56; *TM* 10 (1987), 83.

<sup>53</sup>Individual plates for the sick are mentioned in the hospitals of both Pantokrator and Kosmosoteira.

<sup>54</sup>Hesseling-Pernot, 40, 53, 62.

<sup>55</sup>PG 99, col. 885; *ibid.*, 111, cols. 468, 472, 700; *JÖB* 37 (1987), 37; Papadopoulos-Kerameus, Ἀνάλεκτα Ἱεροσολυμιτικῆς Σταχυολογίας, V, 351; *idem*, "Žitija dvuh," 6, 98; *idem*, *Σύλλογῃ*, I, 215; *ActaSS*, Nov. III, 552 (συμβατή τῶν); AB 54 (1936), 80; Vasilevskij, "Life of St Meletios," 56; Sargologos, *Saint Cyrille le Philéote*, 188.

<sup>56</sup>Hesseling-Pernot, 36.

as well. This refectory contained tables and benches that could seat more than a hundred monks, but there is not a single piece of furniture that would have to be mentioned in a list such as those that we have been studying. Other variants, of the eleventh century, are preserved in Nea Moni on Chios and in Hosios Loukas; another, from the twelfth century, is found in the monastery of Patmos. It is conceivable that the very wealthy could have afforded special dining rooms with permanent tables in their mansions.<sup>57</sup>

If we now return to the lists we have been analyzing, we see that out of a total of fourteen documents, five explicitly mention tables, and only two of these five mention, along with the tables, any benches or stools. This cannot be a random omission. The matter becomes clearer when we note that the two documents, of 1119 and 1270–74, which mention furniture for seating are also the only two that mention beds. It is unlikely that we are faced with mere coincidence. The situation could hardly represent a geographical or chronological peculiarity, because these two documents are quite distant chronologically and geographically (Chalkidiki in eastern Macedonia and Patmos, an island of the Dodecanese). One must seek the explanation by examining the various types of houses and life-styles that may have existed simultaneously in the Byzantine Empire. And for that purpose I propose to begin my explanation with a lexicographical note.

The Greek word κλίνη meant a couch in antiquity and has the same meaning in modern Greek. It has consequently been assumed that it meant the same thing throughout the Middle Ages, and the word has been interpreted accordingly. However, some ten years ago, the late José Grosdidier de Matons demonstrated that in the middle Byzantine period (roughly from the tenth to the late twelfth century) and probably later, the word κλίνη was used to indicate the seat next to the table, “un fauteuil de table.”<sup>58</sup> If we think of rooms as I have described them above, with a couch along three walls, we can understand how the meaning of the word κλίνη may have changed: in these rooms there was no need for chairs or stools; at mealtime one could sit on the permanent bench

(couch *and* chair) and either place one's food at one's side (something that I have observed on Mount Athos) or use a table or other piece of furniture placed between the benches. In the absence of a table, this other piece of furniture could well have been one of the chests that are mentioned in many households. One should not forget that from late antiquity onward, the dining room was mainly called τρικλίνιον or τρικλινάριον,<sup>59</sup> the “three-couch room,” terms that fitted particularly well with the room arrangement that I have tried to describe.

In other words, one has to assume that during the middle and late Byzantine periods, two styles of interior arrangement of the average house must have existed in villages as well as in cities, both inspired by ancient types.<sup>60</sup> One type followed the model of the affluent: since rooms in these houses were not lined with permanent benches, a certain amount of furniture was required: this included tables, chairs or stools, and beds or couches. The other, more “medieval” type, is also known from antiquity and is primarily characteristic of the living quarters of the poor. It had a permanent wooden or stone-built couch, a kind of divan, which covered three sides of the room (τρικλίνιον) and which could serve as bed and chair. This second type reflected the more rudimentary and simple way of life that characterized the Middle Ages. Less luxurious, it seems to have prevailed in most middle and late Byzantine households, including some affluent ones.

A change in house arrangements as well as in household furnishings also means a change in life-style. Less sophisticated and demanding, the new life-style was simpler and offered everyone the basic amenities of life at less expense. Since both styles of housing, with or without basic movable pieces of furniture, had existed since antiquity, what changed in medieval times was the frequency with which the one or the other was used, and the social level to which each corresponded. All this fits very well with the general atmosphere of the Middle Ages, when an open economy, big, bustling cities, outwardness, and cosmopolitanism gave way to a closed economy, small, sleepy towns, inwardness, and marked provincialism.

When did this new mode prevail? It is likely that this occurred during the so-called “dark ages,”

<sup>57</sup> In the 8th century, St. Philaretos had an “old” table covered with ivory: *Byzantion* 9 (1934), 137. A long table decorated with precious stones is also described in the “Life of Basil the Younger,” ed. A. Veselovskij, 43.

<sup>58</sup> J. Grosdidier de Matons, “Note sur le sens médiéval du mot κλίνη,” *TM* 7 (1979), 363 ff.

<sup>59</sup> Koukoules, *Life*, IV, 294.

<sup>60</sup> For antique house types and arrangements see Veyne, *Private Life* (above, note 2), and H. Blank, *Einführung in das Privatleben der Griechen und Römer* (Darmstadt, 1976).

sometime between the mid-seventh and the ninth centuries. Many scholars have championed the idea of a basic change in Byzantium after the reign of Heraclius. And the truth of this statement can be shown, as far as our subject is concerned, by examining once more what is said by Koukoules about beds. If one looks at his references, one realizes that there is a real dichotomy in the documentation. In the sources of the third to seventh centuries that he quotes, beds are mentioned roughly as frequently as bedcovers. But when we turn to sources from the eighth to fifteenth century, there are four times as many references to bedcovers than there are to beds.<sup>61</sup> It is clear that the bed as a separate object had in the meantime become rare, and consequently was not mentioned as often, while the covers, which continued in use

in the new-style houses, were mentioned with the usual frequency. The same exercise can be repeated with other household items. If it were done in a systematic way, this kind of arithmetic might provide Koukoules' book with the methodological refinements that would make it much more enlightening and useful.

I am aware that the new documentation that I have used is small in quantity and its proof value is limited; I am also aware that, in spite of preaching methodology, I have been treating my material as if it concerned only one reality, in spite of the fact that the households under consideration are separated by many centuries and great distances. Subtler nuances are impossible, at least in our present state of knowledge. I have tried to demonstrate one way, among others, that might be used in preparing a new study on the "Life and Civilization of the Byzantines." Let us hope that more refined answers will be obtained from archaeology and from painstaking in-depth research into works of art.

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<sup>61</sup>These statistics are based on Koukoules, *Life*, II/2, 67–77. For the period up to the 7th century, I counted 40 references to beds and 44 to bedcovers; for the 8th–15th centuries, I counted 24 references to beds (including the ambiguous term *κλίνη*) and 97 to bedcovers.